

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 48th SESSION

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation – 15 September 2021

[Mr Pedro Arrojo-Agudo - Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation](#)

- *Thematic report “Plan and vision for the mandate from 2020 to 2023” ([A/HRC/48/50](#))*

The report characterises the problems and challenges faced in the context of a global crisis that is as serious as it is paradoxical: the **global water crisis on the Water Planet**, the Blue Planet, **with 2.2 billion people without guaranteed access to drinking water and 4.2 billion without basic sanitation**. This crisis generates a growing wave of **socio-environmental conflicts** around the world, but also **conflicts** that are sometimes used and manipulated to justify wars between peoples and nations.

The root causes of this global water crisis lie at the confluence of two major structural flaws in the current development model:

1. The **unsustainability of aquatic ecosystems**, caused by ourselves, turning water from being the key to life into a **terrible vector of disease and death**.
2. The **poverty, inequality, discrimination** resulting from the **prevailing socio-economic order**.

Most of the 2.2 billion people without guaranteed access to safe drinking water are in the vast majority, **impoverished people living next to polluted rivers**, springs and aquifers.

Today, unfortunately, three factors are aggravating, deepening and extending this global crisis:

1. The **commodification and financialization of water**, insofar that it makes those who are vulnerable even more vulnerable by transforming people into mere customers.
2. **Climate change**, which generates the greatest social impacts around the water vector.
3. The **COVID-19 pandemic**, which has deepened inequalities and extended poverty.

The report identifies three key objectives that will mark the main strands of the work of the Special Rapporteur from 2020 to 2023:

1. To **promote democratic water and sanitation governance**,
2. **Making peace with our rivers and restoring the sustainability of our aquatic ecosystems** as a key to securing the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation for the most impoverished.
3. **Promote water as a key to collaboration and peace**.

- *Addendum report “Partnering with organizations”:* [A/HRC/48/50/Add.1](#)

Between January and April 2021, the Special Rapporteur **convened bilateral meetings** with a wide range of international and regional organizations who work on the issue of water, sanitation and hygiene. As a result of these bilateral meetings, the Special Rapporteur’s team produced summaries on the functions and work of these organisations in order to identify possible collaboration with them. The complementary report compiles all this work and defines these lines of collaboration to develop its plans between 2020 and 2023.

The Special Rapporteur can be useful in **opening up perspectives and proposing solutions** in contentious thematic areas where the different institutions of the United Nations system are under strong pressure.



INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE

72 delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue

States **agreed** with the conclusions and observations raised by the Special Rapporteur in his report. When taking the floor, States recalled their intention to **achieve the Sustainable Development Goal number 6** “Ensuring safe drinking water and sanitation for all”.

A majority of States reminded the **negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on the access to water. The pandemic demonstrated that it was the most **vulnerable populations** that were most affected by water scarcity and the water crisis. States underlined the importance of water and sanitation to **combat transmissible diseases**.

Agreeing with the conclusion of the Special Rapporteur, several delegations were concerned over the **risk of financialization of water**. In this regard, the majority of speakers underlined the fact that **water was a universal public good and a human rights**. Water should be **democratically and openly managed**.

Several States also emphasized the fact that **water should not be the source of conflict**, as it is currently the case in some parts of the world. As suggested by the Special Rapporteur, States agreed that **water should be a key for collaboration and peace** rather than conflict.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (72 delegations)

Egypt on behalf of the Group of Arab States, European Union, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Egypt on behalf of Ecuador, Fiji, Hungary and Jordan, Germany, Djibouti, State of Palestine, France, Sovereign Order of Malta, Switzerland, Indonesia, Armenia, Mexico, UNICEF, Slovenia, Egypt, Spain, Senegal, Israel, Costa Rica, Bangladesh, Iraq, Togo, South Africa, Venezuela, Angola, Holy See, Kenya, Russian Federation, Morocco, India, Saudi Arabia, Peru, Malaysia, Nepal, Namibia, China, El Salvador, Portugal, Bolivia, Libya, Mauritania, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Sudan, Gabon, Vanuatu, Hungary, Georgia, Afghanistan, Algeria, Benin, Mali, Vietnam, Botswana, Panama, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, Tunisia, Cameroon, Bulgaria, UNHCR, Timor-Leste. Lesotho, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Tanzania, Cambodia, Azerbaijan, Haiti.

1 NHRI and 10 NGOs took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue:

NHRI India, Swedish Federation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights, Edmund Rice International Limited, Peace Brigades International, Make Mother Matter, Sikh Human Rights Group, China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, Communita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Franciscans International, Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health, Promotion du Développement Economique et Social.

- The Swedish Federation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights deplored the **situation of LGBTQI persons to access water and sanitation**.
- Edmund Rice international called on **India to ensure the right to water and sanitation to all**.
- Peace Brigades International exposed situations in **Mexico, Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras** where **industrial projects** were threatening the **right to water and sanitation** of local populations.
- Make Mother Matter urged authorities to **involve women in decision making** regarding water and sanitation.
- Sikh Human Rights Group called on **strengthening education on water in rural areas**.
- Communita Papa Giovanni XXIII underlined the **link between the water crisis and the current development model**.

Watch the full ID with the Special Rapporteur here (UN Web.TV: [PART 1](#) (from 2:31.40) ; [PART 2](#)